

Rucker Building
Lawyers' Row Block
1403 N. Court House Road
Arlington
Arlington County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1274

HABS
VA,
7-ARL,
8-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RUCKER BUILDING

HABS No. VA-1274

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Location: 1403 N. Court House Road, Arlington County, Virginia

Present Owner: Arlington County, Virginia

Present Use: Demolished in June 1990

Significance: The Rucker Building is part of the Lawyers' Row complex located on the east side of N. Court House Road opposite the 1960 Arlington County Court House. The lawyer's (or courthouse) row represents a cultural and architectural heritage that is unique to Virginia. Beginning in the eighteenth century, small service buildings such as these, subservient to the larger courthouse, were erected to accommodate lawyers and clerks. The Rucker Building was listed on the county's Inventory of Historic Resources. (See Lawyers' Row Block, HABS VA-No. 1277)

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1935-36. According to a building permit on file in the Arlington County, Virginia Planning Office, this structure dates from 1935.
2. Architect: Kenton Hamaker (1909-82).
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building occupied part of lots 13 and 14, block 9, Fort Myer Heights subdivision; the parking lot, lots 15 and 16, block 9. Records are in the Virginia Land Records Office. The following represents an incomplete chain of title:

Deed dated 1 March 1910: R. L. Moncure and wife to George H. Rucker.
Deed book 123, page 407.

Deed dated 23 January 1933: Lizzie C. Rucker, widow, to Claudia R. Stone.
Deed book 340, page 66.

Deed dated 1 April 1949: Claudia R. Stone and W.M. Stone to Ashton C. Jones, W. M. Stone, Ashton C. Jones Jr., Jack R. Jones partners doing business as the George R. Rucker Company. Deed book 880, page 85.

Deed dated 28 April 1987: Ashton C. Jones Jr., surviving trustee, to Eldridge Limited Partnership. Deed book 2278, page 1204.

Deed dated 6 September 1989: The Eldridge Limited Partnership to Arlington County, Virginia. Deed book 2399, page 78.

4. Original plans and construction: None have been located.
5. Alterations and Additions: The following information was obtained from building-permit index files:
 - 9 August 1951: permit #7555 to build an addition
 - 20 July 1955: permit #12604 to construct a new stairway from first to second floor and to finish the second floor
 - 6 January 1984: permit #8910-c to construct interior partitions with electricity

B. Historical Context:

In 1910 R. C. L. Moncure sold the corner lot adjacent to the site of his building to George Rucker. Rucker (1862-1919) was elected Clerk of Court in 1899 and held that post for twenty years until his death. He founded his insurance company in 1906, at the same time serving as an officer of the Virginia Realty Title Company, and was a developer of the Clarendon and Fort Myer Heights subdivisions.¹ In 1927-28 his family real estate and notary business, the Geo. H. Rucker Co., occupied 100 Sherman Avenue—probably the office destroyed to make way for the new concrete-block building. Among the employees at the time were Floyd H. Goff, Ashton C. Jones, and N. Andrew Rees; and Rucker's wife, Lizzie Council Rucker; and William M. Stone.² Rucker was active in the Clarendon Masonic Lodge.

Architect of the Rucker Building, Kenton Hamaker, commenced working in Arlington in the early 1930s with an office in the Rees Building, also built by George Rucker. Prior to World War II, he designed his own home (1938) and others on Ohio Street between Little Falls Road and Williamsburg Boulevard. In 1940 he designed the Westover Hills Shopping Center at 5841-5853 N. Washington Blvd.; in 1946 Hamaker became a principal in Sharpe & Hamaker, general contractors. Until the 1970s he continued to design churches, houses, office buildings, and furniture.³ By the time Hamaker completed 1415 N. Court House Road, his work was described as "both artistic and modern, and yet extremely practical."⁴

¹ "Rucker-Jones-Rees," Biographical Files. Rucker owned the Jones Building, Rees Building (1929), and Rucker Building (1925) in Clarendon.

² Polk's Washington Suburban Directory of Maryland and Virginia Towns Adjacent to the District of Columbia, 1927-28 (R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1927), 633-37.

³ "Kenton D. Hamaker" obituary, Washington Post (ca. 18 May 1982); Jacqueline Antone, "House That Kent Built," Northern Virginia Sun (18 June 1959); AIA membership files; "Hamaker Drawings," Virginia Room. The Virginia Room contains an incomplete collection of Hamaker's drawings, which are indexed; no documentation exists for projects prior to the 1950s.

⁴ "Architect's Work Wins Reputation," The Arlington Courier (28 January 1937).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This one-and-one-half story Colonial Revival-style structure is three bays wide and two bays deep. It has an addition on the rear/east facade that is one story high, three bays wide, and four bays deep.
2. Condition of the fabric: Excellent, prior to demolition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 15,240 square feet (lot).
2. Foundations: Concrete-block.
3. Wall construction: The exterior walls are brick set in running bond. A brick water table spans the west facade; there is brick quoining at the corners of the west facade. One course of horizontal brick headers runs below the band of facing that contains the signage; a course of vertical brick headers runs above the facing. A brick planter (running bond capped with one course of vertical brick headers) is attached to the southwest end of the south facade at grade. A brick enclosure is attached to the east facade between the rear door and the chimney. Concrete guttering runs along the north facade of the original block at grade.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
5. Chimneys: There are two chimneys. An exterior chimney is located at the northeast corner of the addition. It is brick with a terra cotta flue and is capped with a mesh cage. An interior chimney is located near the junction of the addition and the original block. It is brick with a terra cotta flue and a decorative brick cap. It was probably an exterior chimney before the addition was constructed.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front door is located in the center bay of the west facade. It is a panel door with central glazing. There is one oblong window above the transom. The door, which is recessed into the facade about 1', is flanked by five-light sidelights set in wood frames. The architrave is one row of brick headers that project about 1" from the wall. Signage on this door says, Rucker Enterprises, George H. Rucker Realty Corp." and the George H. Rucker Company. A plain, panel door identical to that on the west facade is located in the center bay of the east facade. A hood with a shed roof

covered with asphalt shingles projects above this door; it is supported by two wood braces that are seated on false beams attached to the wall on each side of the door.

- b. Windows: The two outermost bays of the first floor, front/west facade, each contain large plate-glass windows. The north bay has a central glass panel approximately 8' x 4' surmounted by four smaller openings and five-light sidelights. These are set in wood frames painted white. The south bay is identical, except that the central glazing is smaller and set above a dadoed wood panel. The windows on the west facade, first floor, have architraves of one row of headers that project out about 1/2" from the wall. All sills are made of one course of vertical headers. All other windows are casements of various sizes. All trim is painted white. On the north facade of the original block, the first-floor windows are crowned by one course of vertical brick headers with a course of horizontal headers around it.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The gable-end roof of the original block is covered with slate shingles. A turned gable with a hipped roof, also topped with slate shingles, projects from the east slope of the roof. The roof of the addition is flat. The brick enclosure attached to the east facade has a shed roof with a standing-seam metal covering.
- b. Cornice: The cornice on the west facade consists of three courses of brick; a mouse-tooth brick course topped with two courses of horizontal brick stretchers. The north and south walls are parapetted to resemble large chimneys rising above the peak of the roof. The cornice of the north facade of the addition is made of one row of molded brick angled out from the plane of the wall. The parapet of this wall steps up three times before it joins with the north wall of the original structure. The cornice detail of the east facade is corbelled and consists of three rows of horizontal brick stretchers. The cornice detail of this facade is repeated on the south facade of the original block, but not on the south facade of the addition.
- c. Dormers: The two dormers on the west facade have clipped-gable roofs covered with slate shingles. The dormer walls are covered with wood siding painted white. Each dormer has a pair of six-light casements set in a wood frame. Windows, frames, and trim are painted white. A third dormer is located in the east slope of the roof of the original block.

- 9. Decorative elements: Below the cornice on the main facade is a band of sandstone facing set flush with the brick. Brass letters anchored to it read

"Real estate Geo. H. Rucker Co. Insurance." Metal letters reading "Geo. H. Rucker Co." also are anchored to the south end of the east facade just below the cornice near the rear door.

- C. Description of Interior: Access to the interior was denied due to asbestos removal in progress.
- D. Site:
 - 1. General Setting: The Rucker Building was located at the northeast corner of the intersection of N. Court House Road and N. 14th Street; adjacent to the Moncure Building on the north.
 - 2. Landscaping, enclosures: There is a small lawn between the west facade and the sidewalk parallel to Court House Road. The area closest to the street and flanking the steps is planted with evergreen shrubs. A boxwood hedge grows below the window at the south end of the west facade. A large shrub is located at the north end of this planting between the boxwoods and the front door. On the east side of the building is a boxwood foundation planting that grows from the south edge of the rear door to the southeast corner of the building. A brick planter spans most of the south facade; it contains one large bush at the southwest corner of the building, English ivy, and a small forsythia. There are two deciduous trees: on the east side of the parking lot entrance and at the southeast corner of the lot.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Primary and unpublished sources: For a complete bibliography, see this section of Lawyers' Row Block, HABS No. VA-1277.
- B. Likely Sources Not Yet Consulted: The photographic archives of the Arlington Historical Society may contain early views.

Prepared by:
Estella K. Bryans-Munson, Historian
Arlington Heritage Alliance
Spring 1990

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation project was coordinated by Sara Amy Leach for the Arlington Heritage Alliance Inc. with the sponsorship of the Bell Atlantic Charitable Foundation, to mitigate the impending loss of these historic Arlington County buildings. Estella Bryans-Munson served as project historian, and John Schwartz was the large-format photographer. All documentation is available from the HABS Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, at the Library of Congress, and the Virginia Room, Arlington County Library.